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1968/10/28

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

LITERALLY EYES ONLY

Monday, October 28, 1968 -- 12:40 a.m.

Mr. President:

I understand well your reaction to George Ball, the New York Democrats, etc.

I understand well your reaction to the likelihood that Moscow and Hanoi are playing politics.

I understand well the certainty that some will accuse the President of playing politics.

But the tragic dilemma is that you will also be accused of playing politics if you let this slide -- and politics against the party you lead. Harriman and the Russians will see to that.

I am not even sure the deal will be there to pick up after the election.

The only safety I have known over these difficult eight years has been to consult my judgment and my conscience. And I know that has also been your only solace.

There were four people in that room at dinner tonight, aside from yourself, who have lived Vietnam, with all its pain, since January 1961: Rusk, Taylor, Wheeler, and myself.

All of us know that, with all its uncertainties, we have the best deal we now can get -- vastly better than any we thought we could get since 1961.

If we go ahead we know it may be tough. But with military and political determination we believe we can make it stick -- not because we are so smart; but because your courage, the quality of our fighting men, and the resilience and simple gallantry of the South Vietnamese people give us the tools to make it stick.

We know we could be wrong.

But we laid our judgment on the line in much tougher and more ambiguous circumstances than these.

DECLASSIFIED

E.O. 12356, Sec. 3.4

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By mg NARA, Date 12-7-92

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And none of us would know how to justify delay.

You know you can count on me. I delivered the message as hard to Dobrynin tonight as anything I've ever done. But I do wish you to know how I feel.

I would do anything I know how to do to ease the President's dilemma. But I do not believe all the prior consultations with the leadership, candidates, etc., can ease it. Only the President can decide. And whatever he decides, I'll be there.

W. Rostow

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